
The Alaska Comfort One Program

Information for Patients and Families

Overview

Some individuals who are terminally ill do not wish to have life saving measures, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), performed when their breathing and heartbeat stop.

In October, 1996, Alaska laws and regulations established the “Comfort One Program” to help health care providers identify terminally ill persons who have expressed these wishes. In addition, the program establishes a protocol for health care providers to respect these wishes once the person has been identified as being enrolled in the program.

A standardized form, wallet card, and optional bracelet, obtained through a physician, serve to alert health care providers that the patient has been issued a valid Do Not Resuscitate order and that CPR should not be performed or should be stopped when the identification is discovered. This is particularly helpful for prehospital emergency care providers, such as Emergency Medical Technicians and paramedics who often must make split second decisions regarding whether to start CPR.

A Do Not Resuscitate order is different from a “living will.” Living wills are designed to allow the patient to express his or her wishes regarding life sustaining treatments and other medical care when unable to make treatment decisions. However, they do not go into effect until the patient is determined to be in a terminal condition and is unable to make treatment decisions. The Alaska Comfort One program removes the uncertainty

of whether the person has a terminal condition and wishes to have CPR performed or not. By preventing unwanted resuscitation efforts, the program provides benefit to patients and their families, as well as to health care providers, during the time surrounding the patient’s death.

A terminally ill person who is considering enrolling in the Alaska Comfort One program should discuss this program and other “advance directives,” such as living wills, with his or her physician.

A Do Not Resuscitate order is different from a “living will.”



Optional Bracelet

Enrolling in the Comfort One Program

To enroll in the Alaska Comfort One program, a person must have a terminal condition and must complete a simple form which may be obtained from the patient’s physician. The form must be signed by both the patient and the patient’s physician. The top copy of the form is kept by the patient, a second copy is retained by the physician for the person’s medical file. The remaining copies may be provided, by the patient or physician, to other health care professionals, such as hospice workers and/or the dispatch center of the local fire department/emergency medical service.

Proof of Enrollment

At the time the physician enrolls the patient in the Comfort One program, the patient is given a copy of the enrollment form and a wallet card. These should be kept in a visible or easily accessible location.

The person may choose to purchase a Comfort One bracelet. Bracelets are only available to those enrolled in the Comfort One program and are particularly useful for persons who travel outside the home. Bracelets may be purchased through the patient’s attending physician.

The Comfort One form, wallet card, and optional bracelet serve as proof to the health care provider that the person is enrolled in the program.

Emergency Medical Care

If a health care provider finds evidence of enrollment in the Alaska Comfort One program, and confirms the patient's identity, the health care provider will not start CPR. If CPR had been started prior to determining the patient is enrolled in the Comfort One program, it will be stopped.

If the health care providers are unable to confirm that the patient is enrolled in the Comfort One program, they will provide emergency medical care, including CPR, according to their normal guidelines.

The Alaska Comfort One protocols do not affect the provision of medical care other than CPR.

A person may revoke his or her status as a Comfort One patient at any time. For example, the person enrolled in the Comfort One program may destroy the wallet card and form, and may choose not to wear the optional Comfort One Bracelet. The person's attending physician should be notified by the patient that such actions have been taken to avoid any confusion in the event the health care providers contact the physician for advice. Patients who are receiving care from Hospice organizations or from other health care providers should ensure that these personnel are notified of the revocation as well. In addition, the patient may communicate the intent to revoke the Comfort One status directly to the health care provider.

Other Related Programs

Some emergency medical services agencies and fire departments in Alaska have programs which can provide additional services to those enrolled in the Comfort One program. In most circumstances, these programs inform law enforcement, medical, and other key personnel of an expected home death to provide for the least intrusive response. Persons interested in these types of services should ask their physicians to contact the local fire department or ambulance service for additional information.

For more information about the Alaska Comfort One program, contact the Alaska Section of Community Health and Emergency Medical Services at (907)465-3027 or visit its website at <http://www.chems.alaska.gov>.

Comfort One forms and bracelets are available to authorized health care providers from:

Southern Region EMS Council, Inc.
6130 Tuttle Place
Anchorage, AK 99507-2140
(907)562-6449/FAX: (907)562-9893

Interior Region EMS Council, Inc.
3522 Industrial Avenue
Fairbanks, AK 99701
(907)456-3978/FAX: (907)456-3970

Southeast Region EMS Council, Inc.
P. O. Box 259
Sitka, AK 99835
(907)747-8005/FAX:(907)747-1406

The Alaska Comfort One Program

Information for Patients and Families



Alaska Department of Health and Social Services
Division of Public Health
Section of Community Health and EMS
Box 110616
Juneau, AK 99811-0616
(907)465-3027/FAX: 465-4101
